

RR-1(b)



ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: June 7, 2017
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Meeting Date: June 27, 2017

TO: Vancouver City Council

FROM: General Manager of Engineering Services, in consultation with the Director of Corporate Communications

SUBJECT: Single Use Items Update and Consultation Launch

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council receive this report for information and direct staff to report back with the results of Single Use Item Strategy stakeholder consultation and public engagement.

REPORT SUMMARY

In 2016 Council directed staff to review and report back on regulatory options for addressing the distribution, use and recycling of commonly used single use items, such as shopping bags, disposable cups and takeout food containers. This report summarizes the next steps for stakeholder and public consultation.

COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS

On July 12, 2011, Council adopted the Greenest City 2020 Action Plan which includes a long term goal to create zero waste, and a target to reduce total solid waste going to landfill and incinerator by 50% from 2008 levels.

On November 3, 2015, Council adopted Part Two: 2015-2020 of the Greenest City Action Plan with a zero waste priority action to reduce street litter and increase the diversion of single use materials by implementing a comprehensive litter management strategy.

On February 3, 2016, Council directed staff to investigate and report back on regulatory options to address the distribution, use, and recycling of commonly

disposed items designed for single use, including coffee cups, plastic shopping bags and expanded polystyrene fast food packaging, including exploring options to restrict or ban the use of these products.

On May 31, 2016, Council directed staff to undertake a Zero Waste 2040 Strategy that develops a framework to achieve the Greenest City long term goal of creating zero waste by 2040.

CITY MANAGER'S/GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The City Manager, General Manager of Engineering Services and Director of Corporate Communications recommend approval of the foregoing.

REPORT

Background/Context

Significant progress has been made towards reaching the City's 2020 Zero Waste target of reducing total Vancouver solid waste disposed by 50% from 2008 levels. The most current data (2015) indicates that total waste disposed from all sectors in Vancouver has decreased by 27% or 129,000 tonnes since 2008. Efforts to reach the 2020 target continue and in keeping with Council's motion of May 31, 2016 to undertake a Zero Waste 2040 Strategy, our attention is now shifting to more problematic waste types and sources, including disposable items designed for single use.

Work is continuing on development of the overall Zero Waste 2040 Strategy and it will be the subject of a separate report to Council in the fall.

Shifting the Conversation: Prioritizing Reduce and Reuse over Recycle and Dispose

Since introducing the blue box program in Vancouver in 1989, the City has helped to advance recycling across all sectors in Vancouver through programs, policy and bylaw regulation. Every day, residents and businesses support the City's zero waste goal by properly sorting their waste, recycling more and diverting compostable organics from disposal. Efforts continue to maximize waste diversion and we are now seeing a shift in thinking beyond recycling towards zero waste.

City residents are becoming more engaged and pursuing new opportunities involving sharing, repair and reuse, and local businesses are finding new ways to value wasted materials as resources. The general focus is moving from a linear model of consumption, to sustainable practices that support a circular economy. This shift in focus falls in line with the City's long term plans of becoming a zero waste community by 2040. Residents, businesses, business associations, product producers and other levels of government are engaging in conversations and initiatives in support of waste reduction and reuse, and are considering the challenges of becoming a true zero waste community.

Single Use Items

Over the past several decades there has been an increasing trend towards products that are used once and then thrown away. The increase in single use items is driven by a number of factors. Convenience, limited free time, food safety and security, marketing and branding have all influenced the increased use of plastic and paper shopping bags, disposable cups, and takeout food containers. Even so, there is growing recognition that increased use of these items results in increased resource consumption and can have a lasting impact on our environment long after their short useful life.

Plastic and Paper Shopping Bags

Shopping bags, whether plastic or paper, are a convenient method of carrying consumer goods. While they are generally low cost for businesses and consumers, the convenience of plastic and paper shopping bags comes at a cost to the environment. Plastic shopping bags are produced from non-renewable fossil fuels and while paper bags are generally viewed as a more environmentally friendly option, their production has a higher environmental impact in many categories, such as Global Warming Potential, non-renewable energy and water use.¹

It is estimated that over 2 million plastic shopping bags are disposed in the garbage each week in Vancouver, with about 63% of these reused as garbage bags. Plastic bags make up about 2% of large litter items² found on Vancouver streets and 3%³ of items found in Vancouver shoreline clean-ups. Numbers aren't available for the number of paper bags disposed in garbage, but they make up 1% of large litter items² found on Vancouver streets and 1% of shoreline litter³.

Disposable Cups and Takeout Food Containers

The use of disposable cups continues to grow as they provide convenience and save time in our daily lives. Business branding with customised appearances for mobile marketing continues to be important in the drink cup market.

Disposable cups, by weight, are not a significant contributor of waste to landfill or incinerator. However, by volume they take up a considerable amount of space in our disposal systems. In Vancouver alone, it is estimated that 2.6 million polycoat paper cups⁴ are thrown away as garbage each week, plus unknown amounts of hard plastic and polystyrene foam cups.

Disposable cups, lids and sleeves make up 22% of large litter items² and are one of the most commonly littered items on Vancouver streets. Disposable cups and containers make up almost 50% by volume of material collected in street litter cans, costing taxpayers approximately \$2.5 million annually to collect them from streets, sidewalks and litter receptacles.

¹ Life Cycle Assessment for Three Types of Grocery Bags - Recyclable Plastic; Compostable, Biodegradable Plastic; and Recycled, Recyclable Paper, Chaffee, et al., 2007

² City of Vancouver's 2015 Vancouver Litter Survey, where "large litter" is defined as litter greater than 4 square inches.

³ Great Canadian Shoreline Clean-Up, Vancouver data 2016.

⁴ Polycoat cups are paper cups that are coated with a polyethylene plastic lining that acts as a moisture barrier. Coffee cups are typically polycoat cups.

Takeout food containers serve multiple purposes: they provide a convenient way to carry food and keep it clean and safe. They provide insulation to keep food hot or cold, and avoid the cost and space of storing and washing reusable dishes. They are made from a variety of materials including various types of plastics, aluminium, coated or waxed paper, uncoated paper and polystyrene foam. It is very difficult to quantify the number of takeout food containers of various types that are used and disposed as garbage in Vancouver.

Take out cups and food containers made of polystyrene foam provide a low cost option for disposable dishware, and BC is fortunate to have a local company that is capable of recycling polystyrene foam. Currently, residents can recycle polystyrene food and drink containers but need to wash them thoroughly and take them to depots. Polystyrene foam food containers can't easily be collected for recycling in quick-serve restaurant facilities, as they need to be rinsed and clean before they can be recycled.

Overall, polystyrene foam accounts for about 1% of large litter on Vancouver streets. While the percentage may be small, given the nature of this material and how easily it breaks apart, it is dispersed by wind and water in the environment and becomes very difficult to clean up. Small foam pieces are one of the more prevalent items found on Vancouver shorelines, accounting for 9% of items collected through shoreline cleanups in 2016.³

Strategic Analysis

Many jurisdictions, both locally and worldwide, are working to address the increasing amounts of waste from plastic bags, cups and food containers with different approaches and varying degrees of success.

- In Ontario grocery stores and the majority of retailers charge a fee for plastic bags.
- The City of Montreal has approved a lightweight plastic shopping bag ban for 2018, and the City of Victoria is currently consulting stakeholders on options to reduce single-use plastic bag use.
- Internationally, bag fees are common in Europe and the UK.
- In the United States there is a mix of approaches, with some states actually passing regulations to restrict bag bans. The state of California recently passed a state-wide ban on lightweight plastic bags, with a fee requirement for any paper bags and a recycled content requirement for reusable plastic bags. Some cities like Chicago started with bans but have reversed them in favour of taxes or fees due to unintended consequences, primarily retailers going to thicker "reusable" bags, which were still ending up in the garbage.
- Over 100 cities in the US including Portland, Seattle and San Francisco have banned the use of polystyrene foam containers by restaurants, food vendors, and in some cases grocers and other retailers.
- Seattle, San Francisco and Minneapolis have recently put requirements in place for mandatory in-store recycling of some food containers.

- A company recently launched a container-share program called “Go Box” in Portland and San Francisco.
- New York has revised its health code to allow customers to bring their own containers to approved quick-serve restaurants with operating procedures that prevent cross contamination and the spread of food-borne illnesses.
- Mug-share programs (similar to bike-share, but for travel mugs) have launched in a number of cities in Germany, and are being piloted in New York.

Current Reduction, Reuse and Recycling Initiatives in Vancouver

There are many programs and initiatives already in place or under development here in Vancouver, which focus on reducing, reusing and recovering single use items for recycling. Examples include:

- Some businesses offer reusable dishware for eating in, charge fees for disposable dishware, or offer discounts for using a reusable alternative.
- Some retailers have chosen not to provide single use items. They provide reminder signage and verbal prompts for customers to use reusable alternatives.
- A number of retailers, now charge for plastic and/or paper bags, and also sell reusable alternatives.
- Based on waste composition studies, about 63% of plastic shopping bags in the garbage have been reused as garbage bags. Residents also reuse plastic bags as lunch bags or general carry bags.
- Disposable cups, many types of takeout food containers and paper bags can be recycled through Recycle BC’s curbside and multi-family residential recycling program.
- Residents can drop off polystyrene foam containers and plastic bags at Recycle BC depots and participating retailers such as London Drugs.
- In partnership with Recycle BC, since 2016 the City has been piloting on-street recycling for disposable cups, non-foam takeout containers and paper bags in select locations in Vancouver.

Possible Approaches, Opportunities and Challenges

Staff conducted an extensive review of regulatory and non-regulatory options that have been undertaken in other areas and could be available to the City. Fees, deposits, bans on distribution and use, disposal bans, mandatory in-store recycling, reuse programs (e.g. Mug-share), education programs, and other initiatives are all under consideration. Staff have researched how these tools have been applied in other jurisdictions, and further consultation provides an opportunity to consider their overall effectiveness and viability in the context of the realities in Vancouver, the region and all of British Columbia.

What has become apparent is that addressing the challenges around single use items is complex and affects all areas of society, and no single intervention can solve the challenge of reducing their use. Effectively addressing single use items in a sustainable long-term manner will require a suite of interventions which may vary based on material type.

Stakeholder Consultation and Public Engagement

Any initiatives designed to dramatically reduce the distribution, use and disposal of plastic and paper shopping bags, disposable cups and takeout food containers will affect almost all consumers and over 10,000 businesses in Vancouver. This includes almost every business and social service agency in Vancouver serving food or beverages to go, and every business that gives out shopping bags. The recycling industry will also be affected, as well as manufacturers and distributors of these products.

Changing how these single use products are used, perceived and managed, as well as balancing convenience versus waste, poses significant challenges. Given the broad nature of the issues and the competing interests of stakeholders, it is critical to consult on long term sustainable solutions, including viable alternatives, which could include a regulatory approach that is gradually phased in over time.

Staff held some initial consultations with stakeholders, beginning with a consultation session on single use items as part of the Zero Waste 2040 workshop consultation series. Participants at the workshop provided valuable suggestions for tackling single use items, and offered initial feedback on some of the challenges and opportunities associated with the broad strategies that could be undertaken. Many workshop participants are leaders in the community and are either taking action or contemplating it now. In addition, staff had initial conversations with Vancouver Coastal Health, Vancouver Aquarium ocean plastics researchers, packaging suppliers, recyclers, composters and other local governments. What has become clear from the feedback received to date is that consultation and collaboration across all sectors of society is a cornerstone of moving towards becoming a zero waste community.

Further dialogue is needed in order to work with stakeholders and the public towards long term sustainable solutions, building on what the City has learned through the research and analysis to date. The next phase of consultation will be phased, beginning with business leaders and industry representatives, social service agencies, advocacy groups and committees, as well as local governments and other government agencies that have specialized knowledge of the industry.

The City will share emerging approaches and seek feedback around the issues, potential solutions, policy directions and timing of options. Staff will use best practices, including a consultation paper to solicit initial comments on potential regulatory and non-regulatory options, tailored focus groups, and related research. The second phase will include multiple opportunities to educate and connect with the public through Pop-Up City Hall and existing summer events, along with gathering opinion research to better understand public values.

The final phase of consultation will include roundtable discussions with interested business and industry stakeholders, as well as a Talk Vancouver survey for members of the general public. The City has set a goal of 5,000 touchpoints with stakeholders, special interest groups and members of the public through this phased engagement process.

Staff propose reporting back to Council later in 2017. The results of this work will be published on the City's website and social media and will include follow-up with those who participated in the consultation paper and focus groups.

Implications/Related Issues/Risk

Financial

Costs associated with the planned stakeholder consultation and public engagement process can be funded from existing 2017 solid waste operating budget, with most outreach being provided by internal staff from Engineering Services and Corporate Communications.

Financial implications resulting from recommended strategies will be identified in the report back to Council later in 2017.

Environmental

Reduction in disposal of single use items will have broad environmental benefits.

Legal

City Council has considerable legislative authority to address the distribution, recycling and disposal of these single use items. The Vancouver Charter authorizes City Council to regulate business, to regulate in relation to health, and to establish and maintain a solid waste disposal system. This authority is sufficient to prohibit businesses from distributing certain types of packaging, including plastic bags, disposable cups and takeout containers, and to prohibit that packaging from being disposed in the solid waste system. Council also has the authority to require businesses to ensure their single use packaging is recyclable or compostable, provide on-site recycling programs, and require businesses to ask customers at the point of sale if they want reusable cups and dishware for consumption on-site, or to ask whether the customers have reusable bags.

City Council does not currently have the specific authority to require businesses to charge a fee, provide a discount, or require refundable deposits on single use packaging. However, the City could seek this authority through a request to the Provincial government for an amendment to the Vancouver Charter.

No legal risks are expected during the consultation and engagement period. The legal implications of any recommended options based on the results of the consultation will be assessed before reporting back to Council later in 2017.

Stakeholder Impacts

The impacts to stakeholders and the general public on various regulatory and non-regulatory policy options will be assessed through the stakeholder consultation and public engagement program described in this report.

CONCLUSION

Stakeholder consultation and public engagement is needed on options being considered, the importance of prioritizing reduction and reuse over recycling, and to motivate reduced consumption of single use items.

The consultation and engagement program described in this report will provide critical information for staff to refine a recommended Single Use Item Strategy that will be brought to Council for consideration and approval later this year. The consultation and engagement program aligns with our Engaged City strategy to move progressive action forward in a way that supports the City's Greenest City 2020 Action Plan and Zero Waste goal.

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